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SUBJECT: GERMANY MAKES PROGRESS ON GHETTO PENSIONS

Classified By: Political M/C John Bauman for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Ambassador J. Christian Kennedy, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, met August 30 with Michael Sell and Ludger Schlieff of the Federal Chancellery to discuss ghetto pensions. Germany has made substantial progress in recent weeks on this issue. Sell and Schlieff reported that the government will create a new 75 million euro fund to cover the claims of approximately 63,000 former "voluntary" ghetto workers who have not yet been paid pensions. The Chancellery expects that 50,000 to 60,000 of these individuals will eventually file claims, which means that each one-time payment will be about 1250 to 1500 euros.

¶2. (C) The German government's purpose, according to Sell and Schlieff, is simply to provide a symbolic recognition of the right of these claimants to a pension. This new fund represents a major step forward from only a few months ago, when government progress was stalled on this issue. Sell and Schlieff indicated that progress was made because of intervention by Chancellor Merkel. The government's only major "red lines" are that they will not make payments a) to descendants of those persons who might be entitled to payments from the special fund, but only to the ghetto workers themselves and b) if the claimant is already receiving a German pension, though there may be the possibility of a bump-up to existing pensions. The government will not force claimants to give up any other rights to pursue payments by accepting this payment, i.e. insist that claimants sign some form of quit claim.

¶3. (C) Sell and Schlieff said the German government has no interest in "playing the biological card," or waiting until claimants have died. Indeed, they indicated that the chancellery will issue policy guidelines later this week describing the fund. Sell and Schlieff expect the administrative infrastructure to be in place very soon -- using the existing Federal Administrative Office -- so that payments could begin later this year.

¶4. (C) In a separate conversation, Germany representative for the Claims Conference, Georg Heuberger, told Kennedy that he believed the number of potential applicants would be closer to 20,000 and payments should then be in the euro 3,500 range. Kennedy later learned from Claims Conference representatives in New York that they were unwilling to accept payments in the euro 1,250-1,500 range and had so informed their German negotiating counterparts.

TIMKEN JR